



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**OPENING STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON.
WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO, PhD, C.G.H., PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE DEFENCE FORCES, AT THE INAUGURAL
COMMITTEE MEETING OF HEADS OF STATE AND
GOVERNMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA**

FEBRUARY 13, 2026

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

**Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency, Chairperson of the African Union
Commission,
Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade
Area,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. Africa today stands at an important moment in its economic journey shaped by major demographic change, expanding regional integration and rapid technological progress.
2. These forces are redefining our role in global markets and creating new opportunities for investment, enterprise, and growth.
3. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063 and a practical expression of our shared vision of 'The Africa We Want'. It reflects our collective determination to build an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful continent, driven by its own citizens and playing a stronger role in the global economy.
4. By bringing together our markets, the AfCFTA creates the basis for structural economic transformation, enabling industrialisation, value addition, and broader-based growth at continental scale.



5. It is in this context that I am honoured to preside over this inaugural meeting of the Committee of Heads of State and Government on AfCFTA Implementation. I thank the AfCFTA Secretariat for convening this meeting on the margins of the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly.

Excellencies,

6. Since entering its operational phase in January 2021, the AfCFTA has made meaningful progress. Most core protocols have been negotiated, and institutional frameworks are in place. Our priority now must shift firmly from negotiation to implementation so that the agreement delivers tangible benefits to Africa's 1.4 billion people.
7. According to projections by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the AfCFTA could increase intra-African trade by up to \$3 trillion and raise Africa's cumulative GDP by about \$1.4 trillion between 2021 and 2045. These gains, however, are not automatic; they depend on disciplined and coordinated execution.
8. The establishment of this committee reflects our shared acknowledgement that successful implementation requires sustained high-level political leadership, strategic direction, and regular accountability.



9. A central focus of our work must be a close partnership with the private sector, including investors, manufacturers, innovators, traders, and entrepreneurs, who will ultimately drive production, trade, and job creation under the AfCFTA framework.
10. Africa's private sector already accounts for the majority of production, investment, credit uptake, and employment across our economies. Its full participation is therefore indispensable to the success of this agreement.
11. Special attention must be given to micro, small, and medium enterprises, which employ large numbers of women and young people and form the backbone of most African economies. Many of these enterprises are ready to expand beyond national borders and take advantage of continental market access.
12. The Biashara Afrika Business Forum held in Kigali demonstrated the growing momentum behind African enterprise and regional value chains. Our responsibility is to ensure that AfCFTA instruments and national policies make it easier - not harder - for MSMEs to participate in cross-border trade.

Excellencies,

13. We are convened today to formally operationalise this committee, agree on clear implementation priorities, strengthen public-private cooperation, and establish a shared continental work programme with measurable outcomes.



14. Our approach should be guided by urgency, practicality, coordination, and outcomes. With focused execution, Africa can strengthen its position as a competitive and resilient economic bloc.
15. As chair of this sub-committee, I assure you of my full commitment to working closely with fellow Heads of State and Government, the AfCFTA Secretariat, Regional Economic Communities, and the private sector to translate this agreement into real economic opportunity for our citizens.
16. The AfCFTA offers Africa a practical pathway from fragmentation to scale, from potential to productivity, and from policy to shared prosperity. Let us match its promise with decisive action.

I thank you.

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